

Iowa Outdoors
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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Sept. 21, 2004

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Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park

OCT. 7 DEDICATION FOR IOWA'S NEWEST STATE PARK

DES MOINES – Iowa's newest state park underwent an "extreme makeover" to create a new venue of family fun in the outdoors from what was once a troubled public wildlife area.

Dedication of Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park, midway between Des Moines and Indianola, will be held Oct. 7 at 4 p.m., the DNR announced today, beginning a new era for the depleted coal mine site, previously known as "Banner Pits."

An investment of nearly \$2 million in park facilities, with some extra amenities, is expected to result in high use of the second new state park in 27 years. The park will also bring cold weather trout fishing to the doorstep of the state's largest metro area. These new features are expected to make the park a popular destination for local residents and bring visitors from outside the metro area.

"Located about the mid-point of the Summerset Bike Trail between Indianola and Carlisle, the DNR and local residents felt we needed to turn this site into a family-oriented state park. We are stocking the largest of the several ponds with trout for winter anglers. Coupled with the 3-level mountain bike trail and re-vamped public shooting range, this will be central Iowa's most diverse state park," said Jeff Vonk, DNR director.

Roads through the park have been paved, boat ramps constructed and new restrooms added, along with a concession stand for the bike trail and shooting range. The shooting range has been improved for safety; however, it will not be opened until the DNR can hire a concessionaire to operate it.

“The new Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park will have a positive impact on the metro Des Moines quality of life. This park has all the potential to be something special in our state parks system,” Vonk said.

The 222-acre site was purchased by DNR in 1954 and has operated as a wildlife area, open 24 hours a day, no gates and little enforcement patrol. As a state park, gates will control access for the daily hours of 4 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. and there will be regular summer patrols by a park ranger.

The public is invited to the dedication ceremony that will offer trolley rides through the park, free hotdogs and hamburgers, presentations by state and local officials and the opportunity to buy T-shirts made in honor of the state’s newest park. The park is located just off US 69/65 midway between Des Moines and Indianola.

For more information, contact Ross Harrison at 515-281-5973.

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DNR RECOGNIZES CAMPGROUND HOSTS WITH PICNIC

MOUNT VERNON — The Iowa Department of Natural Resources thanked 42 of its volunteers last Tuesday, handing out certificates of appreciation at a recognition picnic lunch.

Campground hosts from across the state converged on Palisades-Kepler State Park outside Mount Vernon for a recognition picnic. About 20 volunteers arrived the night before for dinner and a campfire get-together.

“You give so much and do so much,” Diane Ford-Shivvers, a DNR assistant division administrator for conservation and recreation, told the hosts. “You put Band-Aids on ouchies, you act as the face of the park. You are our spokespeople and advocates. You are our most important volunteers.”

Campground hosts stay on state park and recreation area campgrounds during the busy summer camping season. They act as caretakers, information guides and all-around laborers. They receive free camping, but receive no other compensation for their work. Hosts are often retired couples with a lifelong love for camping.

One couple, Marvel and Tom Griffey, have hosted at Walnut Woods State Park for 16 years. They received a set of Iowa Quarters in recognition of their long term of service.

“I just love the park,” said Tom Griffey. “My wife and I both love to camp, and we’ve got a good ranger. That’s important.”

Across the state, over 100 people volunteered as campground hosts this year, including the 42 that attended Tuesday's celebration. They put in more than 7,000 hours, contributing an estimated \$100,000 worth of labor to the state (according to the Independent Sector).

Tasks taken on by campground hosts include mowing lawns, cleaning bathrooms, reporting rule violations and giving advice to visitors.

"Our park is a very quiet secluded sort of park," said Carol Barnes, who hosts at Pilot Knob State Park with her husband, Al. "There's a lot of bird watching. We've become birders because we get so many questions."

The recognition picnic featured speeches by various DNR staff, including park managers and rangers who benefit from their hosts' work ethic. Bob Schierbaum, DNR southwest state park district supervisor, gave a presentation and showed a video covering the history of Civilian Conservation Corps work in Iowa's parks.

Kevin Szcodronski, head of the DNR parks bureau, talked about the "Iowa Parks 2020" initiative, a plan to reinvigorate Iowa's state parks by their 100th anniversary in the year 2020. He also engaged in a spirited discussion with the audience over plans to implement a reservation system in Iowa's state park campgrounds.

For more information, contact Tom O'Neill at 515-281-4539.

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HUNTERS YOUNG AND OLD LEARN SAFETY BEFORE HEADING TO THE FIELD

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Some of you will be taken by surprise. Others know better. You just put it off. Iowa's fall hunting seasons are upon us...but there will still be night-before-opening-day calls, asking how you can get your license, without taking hunter education training. The answer will be simple. You can't.

Not if you were born after Iowa's January 1, 1967 cutoff date. Not if you haven't taken the 10-hour course or the relatively new independent/online program. (Requirements differ for residents on their own property.) This time of year, though, young hunters—and some not so young—are wrapping up that requirement, so they can take the field, safely, come opening day.

For 32 people, that came last weekend, at one sponsored by the Johnson County chapter of the Izaak Walton League. During the Saturday session, they reviewed safe firearm handling, and learned about wildlife habits, habitat as well as safety, orienteering and ethics. On Sunday, they hit the new target range on the Hawkeye Wildlife Area. Some felt awkward handling a bow. Others wound their way through a hayfield 'hunting trail,' ready to make split second decisions. The smoke and sound of the muzzleloader left a few of them in awe. And one of them even shattered all five of his clay targets on the shotgun range.

Most were in their mid-teens. There were a couple college-aged women; a couple almost-12-year-old-boys; even a parent or two, alongside their kids. "Show me how the action opens," directed instructor Brad Freidhof. Each student demonstrated that the firearm selected was unloaded and safe for handling. "We improvise hunting situations; different scenarios and then ask if it is a 'shoot or don't shoot' situation," explained instructor Pat Zimmerman. "They have to consider the variables. Are there any obstacles? Is another hunter in the area? Where is the road? In a hunting situation, they only have a split second sometimes to make the correct decision."

Tyler Smith and Nick Henry of Solon each passed the class. Nearly 12 now, each will be certified on his birthday. Though they have hunted for several years, they may now buy and hunt on their own license, as they and their parents determine it's time. The class exposed them to a few new things, too. "I got to learn some cool things about archery and hunting," recalls Nick, demonstrating how he should line up the arrow nock against his face. "I hit three out of five (clay targets). On the other two, I couldn't find the safety (on the strange gun) in time." Each of them did well on the written test, though they had questions about terms that they don't remember being covered in class. "Like 'projectile.' Now, I know it is a single item leaving the gun barrel; not like bb loads in a shotgun," explains Tyler. "I like shooting the muzzleloader, too."

Students are taking a new, standardized test. And there are still a couple kinks to work out. "There are phrases, usage of words that make sense in one region, but not in another area, like Iowa," points out chief instructor Jim Smith. "We can catch those and stress them to the students." Smith oversees about a dozen other volunteers in Johnson County, who help turnout 200 or more successful students each year. Each county has a similar alignment. DNR officers augment the curriculum.

And while any hunting injury or fatality is too many, the totals have bottomed out from years with double-digit deaths and scores of injuries, just a few decades ago.

Chalk it up to another hunter education class in Iowa.

Hunter Ed Classes Coming

The Iowa DNR has developed an independent/internet hunter education course designed for adults who work evenings and weekends. Adults wishing to participate in this delivery method must understand that this is a three-part process. Adults must first

complete the online internet course work which will take 8 to 10 hours. The second part requires bringing quizzes completed with 100 percent accuracy to a scheduled classroom session. The third step involves attending a scheduled classroom session after successfully completing a closed book pre-test. The student must pass the pretest with a score of 80 percent or better to continue with the class. Use the online course listings to locate a scheduled independent/internet classroom session. Visit www.ihea.com for the online course.

Early Duck Opener

Warm afternoons kept it summer-like, as Iowa's early duck season opened over the weekend, in Iowa's north zone. However, cool mornings and moving ducks meant it was time to hunt. "It seems like most hunters were getting some shooting; some ducks," relays DNR wildlife biologist Tim Thompson. Thompson checked hunters Saturday on the Hawkeye Wildlife Area, in northwest Johnson County. "I saw more green-winged teal taken than blue-wings," adds Thompson. "They were migrating birds. There were some wood ducks, too. *They* were local birds."

Iowa's early season closed Wednesday in that north zone (basically, north of Interstate 80). The south zone 'early' season is just this weekend, September 25-26. The seasons resume later in the fall.

Welcome Changes for Target Shooters

Hunters heading to the Hawkeye Wildlife Area this fall, to sight in firearms, may not recognize their surroundings. While the area's shotgun/trap range has been open for nearly a year, construction continues on the rifle/pistol range. Shooting is allowed, *around* the construction schedule.

"There is still a lot of work to be done," notes DNR wildlife biologist Tim Thompson. "However, there is heavy demand for target shooting. We are trying to concentrate it on those two areas. That should make it better for shooters and safer for others who use the Hawkeye Area for hunting, bird watching or other pastimes." Thompson admits there will be an educational curve, to steer target shooters to the new facilities from various unmarked spots. The 12-station shotgun/trap range is on the south side of Amana Road NW, one-half mile past Greencastle Road. The rifle/pistol range is between there and Greencastle Road, on the north side of Amana Road.

More than \$100,000 has been allocated for the project mostly through Hawkeye Area crop lease payments. A Friends of Hawkeye Shooting Area group has been established to help fund improvements; such as shooting benches, signs, fencing and maintenance. More than \$3,000 has been pledged thus far. Thompson can be contacted (354-8343) for more information.

Dirt work is completed on the 100-yard and the 25 yard ranges. It will continue on the 50-yard range as funding allows. Seeding and matting the slopes, as well as

installation of shooting benches and concrete shooting tubes, will continue this fall. Additionally, a security fence will be installed. Eventual plans call for shooters to hold a permit, or be a guest of a permittee, to use the rifle/pistol range. That should ensure safety and eliminate the deposit of appliances, furniture and other eyesores 'used' for targets. "Metal silhouette targets—which can be taken with the shooter--will be allowed," says Thompson. "We also plan to have something in place for hanging paper targets, too. We want to discourage leaving junk and fragments all over the place."

News notes:

National Hunting and Fishing Day will be celebrated Saturday, September 25 from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. at the Izaak Walton League Linn County chapter grounds in Cedar Rapids. Conservation groups and recreation agencies will staff booths and answer questions about hunting, fishing and upcoming seasons. Demonstrations will range from flycasting to fish ID clinics to Dutch oven cooking. The chapter's air rifle, .22 rifle and archery ranges will be open for the event.

Channel Catfish stocking. Fall stocking of channel catfish is underway. Lake Macbride in Johnson County received 8,100 seven-inch cats this week. Pleasant Creek Lake in Linn County gets 4,100 ten-inch fish this month, also. The stockings are part of the annual management of the lakes, which are heavily utilized by anglers. Channel catfish, as a rule, do not reproduce in Iowa's constructed lakes. Larger fish are needed in Pleasant Creek because of heavier predation by bigger fish in the clear water environment.

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